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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, October 21, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "SPICES." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture,

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Every night at dinner someone says, "Pass the pepper, please."

There goes another bit of the millions of pounds of spices and condiments imported into this country every year.

Americans are so fond of their pepper and mustard, their gingerbread and spicy apple pie, that they spent more than 12 million dollars for more than 110 million pounds of imported spices and condiments last year. It's all down in the statistics of the U. S. Department of Commerce.

Plain black pepper is the most popular among the spices; mustard, second. Then come cinnamon and ginger, nutmeg and mace, cloves and tumeric.

It's evident that spices haven't lost much of their popularity in the years that have passed since Columbus made his famous voyage looking for a new way to get precious spices. We needn't flatter ourselves he was looking for the New World when he made that voyage.

Well, anyway, this month we are celebrating the 446th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. And the Bureau of Home Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture features spices and their use in a recent release. It tells something of how spices are grown and harvested in the far away Orient:

"Tropical suns, rains, and winds help to store the rich aroma and rare flavor of many spices and condiments. And it takes Oriental patience to grow, harvest, and cure these products, and prepare them for shipment. To get good quality cinnamon or cassia, natives cut out the inner bark from the center of two-year old trees. Then they slit the bark, ferment it, and repack it in layers.

"Mace grows as a crimson network covering on nutmeg seeds, and must be cut from each nutmeg by hand.

"For tumeric Orientals select and grind small pieces of the rootstock of the plant. Yellow tumeric is the spice that gives color to the mixture of spices known as curry powder.

"Laborers watch the clove trees and the caper bushes and pick the buds just before they burst into bloom. They dry the cloves in the air and pickle the capers in vinegar, that Americans may have their spices.

"The allspice berries and black peppercorns are fruits gathered just before they are ripe and then dried.

"Black and white pepper come from the same peppercorns. For black pepper, the entire berry is ground. For white pepper, the outer black coat is stripped off first. Since much of the "heat" of the pepper is in the black outside coat, white pepper is more mild than black.

"Cayenne, the most sizzling of the peppers, is made by grinding the small pods of a plant related to the tomato. Paprika resembles Cayenne in color, but not in its biting pungency. Paprika is made by pulverizing milder varieties of plants similar to those used for Cayenne. The term "red pepper" means any pepper with red color.

"And here are some hints for using spices in cooking.

"When you are seasoning with spice, use 'moderation' and 'variety' as your mottoes. A little spice is good, but too much easily spoils a dish. Without variety even the best spices soon become monotonous.

"Many cooks have won fame by adding an unexpected bit of spice to foods commonly accepted at their face value. Some of these additions are now so common as to be part of standard recipes. We often put gingerroot in pear preserves, cloves and bay leaf in tomato soup and sauce. Cloves and baked ham go together. Mustard comes with the molasses in baked beans. The southern cook knows how to use nutmeg in mashed sweetpotatoes.

"But there are many more unusual touches that have proved happy discoveries. Remember just touches.

"Try adding a grating or two of nutmeg to chicken soup or creamed spinach. A dash of mace is good in oyster bisque or string beans. A little curry powder gives lima beans a distinctive flavor. Curry powder gives an interesting flavor to a mixed green salad, and a white sauce seasoned with curry is delicious on poached or sliced hard-cooked eggs.

"The ancient Aztecs, it is said, spiced their hot chocolate with cinnamon, and modern Mexicans keep that custom today. So blend a little ground cinnamon with the cocoa if you would like a different flavor for variety's sake. Some persons also like to drop a whole clove or two in a cup of hot tea or hot consomme.

"For another seasonal drink there's hot spiced grape juice, or spiced cider. Tie mixed whole spices -- cinnamon bark, cloves, and allspice -- in a cheesecloth bag and drop this bag of spices into the kettle of fruit juice. Then bring the juice to a boil. Allow the bag of spices to stand in the juice for several hours or until the drink has just enough spice to suit your taste.

"You will want to serve either of these popular autumn drinks piping hot, so add a little sugar. For hot drinks taste less sweet than the same drinks would served cold. For each quart of fruit juice, about 1/4 to 1/2 cup of extra sugar. Then test by tasting."

That's all the spice talk for today.
